

Last Mile Initiative

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Neither Snow nor Harmattan nor Gloom of Night

With more than 3000 outlets spread across the country, NIPOST (the Nigerian post office) has offices in even the most remote corners of the country. Now NIPOST is introducing NetPost to transform last-mile links from letters to e-mail.

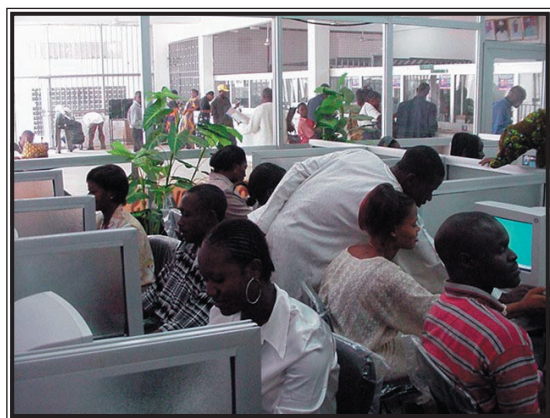


Photo by Raymond Akwile, LMI Implementing Partner.

NetPost sites attract many customers with their cybercafe, telephone, and money transfer services.

Last Mile Coordinator in Nigeria, Brian Mitchell of the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association, will be working with small business owners who will hold many of the NetPost franchises. If NetPost is to succeed in bridging the last mile, these entrepreneurs must understand how to transform their basic business skills to take advantage of new technologies -- e-mail, e-post, e-commerce -- in markets where the typical customer is extremely poor.

Mitchell, a veteran of USAID and other telecommunications programs around the world, points to the demonstration effect. "We'll need to persuade entrepreneurs and investors that there is a reasonable profit to be made by extending telecommunications to the majority of Nigerians who reside in rural areas." ■



Photo by Raymond Akwile, LMI Implementing Partner.

Satellite for a NetPost site--one of many in post offices around Abuja, Nigeria.

Innovation Team Advises Reliance on Standards

Leigh Shamblin of AID/Macedonia got more than she bargained for when she asked for help structuring a national wireless network tender. The Last Mile Innovation Team filled her inbox with ideas, and conducted an online debate about available options. "Innovation is not just about responding to mission questions," says EGAT's Last Mile Coordinator Jeff Cochrane. "It's about injecting fresh new perspectives very early in the creative process of program design."

For example, Janice Brodman of dot-ORG urged that manufacturers of proprietary technologies be required, at no additional charge, to upgrade to WiMAX, the emerging industry standard for community wireless, as soon as it becomes available in 2005. The many small and large manufacturers expected to adopt the WiMAX standard, especially in the U.S., are widely seen as key to lower prices and market growth. Programs that lock communities into proprietary technologies might prove cheaper in the short run, but may ultimately make programs unsustainable in the longer term.

"This is just the kind of issue we want our Last Mile Innovation Team to be discussing with missions," says Cochrane. "We'll be diversifying that team in 2005, and looking for ways to help missions benefit." ■



Last Mile is an Initiative of
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